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Pak Lah: Malaysia has to be thoroughly prepared for Pulau Batu Putih

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - After winning the Sipadan and Ligitan case at the International Court of Justice, Malaysia now has to be thoroughly prepared for Pulau Batu Putih, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

"All arguments pertaining to the case has to be in order," he said.

Abdullah, who is also the Home Minister, was speaking to reporters after hosting his ministry's Hari Raya open house here today.

The island, a small rocky outcrop located about 15 nautical miles off Pengerang, Johor, is also being claimed by Singapore, which calls it Pedro Branca.

The decision to bring the dispute to the ICJ was reached at a meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in Langkawi in September last year.

Singapore first showed its intention to stake its claim on the island in 1989 when its forces stopped Malaysian fishermen from fishing near the island.

In The Hague, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia was waiting for Singapore to provide a suitable date to sign the Special Agreement to bring their dispute over the island to the ICJ, Carolyn Hong reports.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia hoped to sign the documents as soon as possible. "Once we can agree on a suitable date, we will sign. The text of the Special Agreement has already been agreed upon," he said after the ICJ delivered its judgment on Sipadan and Ligitan islands.

The court had confirmed Malaysia's sovereignty over the two islands in the Sulawesi Sea, off the south-eastern coast of Sabah.

Syed Hamid said he had hoped to sign the Special Agreement with Singapore in September when he was in the republic for the water negotiations, but Singapore preferred a separate date.

The Special Agreement is the first step to begin the legal process in the ICJ, the judicial arm of the United Nations.

In Johor Baru, Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman said Malaysia would still stand a good chance of winning its territorial dispute with Singapore even if the ICJ applied the same principles as in Sipadan and Ligitan.

Malaysia had "very strong" historical and geographical arguments to support its case, Ghani said after chairing the State Exco meeting at Bukit Timbalan here.

These two factors, he said, would most probably outweigh the important principles of territorial governance and administration in the Sipadan and Ligitan case, which seemed to favour the republic in the case of Pulau Batu Putih.

Singapore currently operates a lighthouse, on Pulau Batu Putih.

Ghani said the documented historical evidence of Malaysia's rights over the island and its location, which sits within Malaysia's territorial waters, were vital elements which would most likely be given a lot of consideration by the ICJ.

"We also have a very strong argument in the documented historical evidence which support our claims."